

Breakout Discussions: President's Management Agenda and Citizen-Centered Government

4. How Do We Engage Employees in Citizen-Centered Government: Leadership and Employee Development?

The Gallup Q12 Survey and the Invest in People Initiative – Linda Repasky and Bernardine Karunaratne (Linda_Repasky@fws.gov and Bernadine_Karunaratne@gallup.com)

The Fish and Wildlife Service's primary mission is protection and conservation of natural resources. With 8000 employees nationwide in 7 regions and headquarters in DC, 50% of the workforce is biologists and other scientific employees with the other 50% park rangers, outdoor recreation planners, and administrative/clerical staff. The Northeast Region (Region 5) has just under 1000 employees spanning a broad geographic and political area (13 states) and located in very remote areas (usually small offices). The workforce is highly technical and dedicated with a vast majority being Myers-Briggs ISTJ (fact-oriented, deadline driven introverts). Supervisors are selected for their strong technical expertise rather than for interpersonal or managerial skills. The challenge for FWS in engaging its employees in citizen-centered government was softening the workplace environment and injecting a sense of caring and concern for employees.

The thinking behind the Invest in People Initiative was that employees must be satisfied to satisfy customers and meet citizen expectations. The basis for satisfying employees depended on first-level supervisors, who have the greatest effect on how employees feel about the workplace. Those feelings drive productivity, retention, and focus on citizen needs. Employees need to feel that they matter and that their work counts before they can concentrate on satisfying customers. The goal was to create a stronger sense of involvement and caring in the workplace which would result in greater retention, productivity, and overall employee satisfaction. Based on these goals, the Regional Director came up with the Invest in People concept and top managers were to implement the specific way to achieve the goals. Most managers assumed this meant more flexitime, telecommuting, childcare, awards. But they really wanted to address the real issues rather than just a "band-aid" quick fix. While searching for possible approaches, FWS managers discovered that the Gallup organization had already done research that coincided with their observations on the importance of first level supervisors. So FWS launched Invest in People with the Gallup program as its foundation, using the Gallup Q12 survey to measure employee engagement levels, which in turn created the opportunity for dialog between supervisors and employees. Of particular interest to the managers was Gallup's extensive research-based foundation, which would have far more credibility than other programs, which could be more easily be attacked by the scientifically-minded employees. In addition to the Gallup survey and follow up, Invest in People includes other programs, such as: a Leadership Development program, a Mentoring program, Clerical retreats, and Praise and recognition programs.

FWS and the Gallup Organization administered survey, with its twelve questions all deeply founded in Gallup research. Managers encouraged all employees to respond, but participation was voluntary. Employees responded via computer (Internet) or telephone (toll-free call). Responses were confidential. Results were compiled for smallest work unit components (Gallup requires five or more responses per work unit, to assure confidentiality.). The first survey had a very high response rate (93% of all employees responded). The greatest strength was on the question, "The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important," and the lowest score was in the area of praise and recognition, "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work." FWS administered the same survey 16 months after the first survey and had a somewhat lower response rate with overall

engagement scores rising substantially in all twelve areas.

Managers are now in the process of developing new action plans throughout the region. Training of all supervisors and managers was key. Training was presented in a classroom setting. It was mandatory training for every supervisor, manager, and team leader -- no exceptions. The training was held at two sites, to shorten the travel distance and expense for participants. FWS chose to have Gallup conduct the training for supervisors to ensure higher credibility for the program. Gallup customized the training by extending it from 4 hours to a full day program, while adding practical skills-based information on what supervisors and managers could do to become stronger as people-managers. Gallup added several hours of information on how managers and supervisors could interact better with their employees to foster higher employee engagement.

After the training "back at the ranch," the expectation was that every supervisor would sit with his/her staff to explain the survey results and work on developing an action plan. Employees, not the supervisor, would decide which of the twelve areas they wanted to improve. Typically, work groups selected two or three areas on which to do action planning. The premise: work on things that are controllable at the lowest level, since these often have significant impact.

Alas, the survey was not a panacea! Supervisors and managers varied in their acceptance of the Gallup principles with some immediately embracing them and others feeling the approach was too "touchy-feely." All supervisors, though, got a solid grounding in a management approach which was different from what they would have been doing. Supervisors' and managers' most frequent concerns were: flavor of the month so why bother and Gallup's 5-response report minimum. The 5-response minimum was a big issue for many supervisors who oversee very small staffs. So they combined the results of small offices with other small offices, or rolled them up to the next higher level and supervisors just didn't like that at all. However, employees generally were very excited about the Gallup survey and the follow-up action planning process.

Gallup's research-based grounding went a long way in giving the program credibility with the scientific managers and staff. Key things we learned by going through the survey and follow-up process include:

- a. communication is critical in the early stages, long before the survey is administered.
- b. Inform/involve supervisors/managers early on, and make the process unthreatening as possible.
- c. Inform employees after supervisors and managers have had the chance to let this sink in.
- d. Remind and re-remind employees of the confidentiality of their survey responses.
- e. Have managers to read *First, Break All the Rules* before survey process begins. [This book, written by two Gallup researchers, explains much of the Q12 process and principles behind it.]
- f. Many managers (and many employees) felt the best part of the entire Gallup process was the opportunity to discuss workplace issues in a context that rarely occurs in a day-to-day setting.
- g. Mandating follow-up by supervisors and managers is important. Employees will have their expectations raised simply due to the administration of the survey.
- h. Monitor the status of action plan development and implementation. Some expected this to be a passing fancy. Top management interest and monitoring go

- i. a long way to ensuring that the initiative is taken seriously. Behind the scenes prep time is extensive for the first survey. Preparing the roll-up reports (identifying relationships) is the most time-consuming aspect of the preparations.

Engaging Employees in Citizen Centered Government at the Bureau of Reclamation – Jackie Stephens (JSTEPHENS@do.usbr.gov)

The Bureau was established in 1902 and now has 5 regions with Commissioner's Offices in DC and Denver, 26 area offices covering 17 western states, and 6,000 employees. BOR began customer service initiatives in 1993 in implementing the Executive Order and GPRA. In 1996, BOR formed its Customer Service Initiative Team (CSIT) that began conducting customer satisfaction surveys in 1997-1998 and established a Customer Information System (CIS) in 1998-2000. The Agency conducted a Customer Service Benchmarking Study in 1999-2000.

Reclamation's Principles of Customer Service

We guarantee our customers courtesy and respect, prompt answers, single points-of- contact, educational and plain English information, their ideas considered, prompt responses to suggestions, and effectively trained employees.

To ensure that the Agency carried out these principles across the board, the CSIT developed a Customer Service Training Module and delivered it to all managers and staff. Developing the training module involved the following steps:

- ❑ Process for identifying and selecting the “best in the business” training providers
- ❑ Factors which determined curriculum to be appropriate and adaptable
- ❑ Collaborative process with vendor to construct Reclamation specific examples
- ❑ Variable delivery options to best meet customer needs
- ❑ Trainer selection and certification process
- ❑ Training implementation plan and scheduling process

The positive outcomes of engaging all employees in citizen-centered government for BOR has been the identification of employee strengths and areas that need to be strengthened, the effectiveness of the delivery methodology (adult learning techniques) the effectiveness of multi-disciplinary attendee mix, the effect of training on meeting customer needs and customer satisfaction, the additional learning by all employees gained through participation in formal training. The feedback from participants was helpful in improving content and delivery for future training sessions.